

Bones By GenieVB

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Summary: Scully & Mulder unexpectedly face an unusual discovery, an answer to an old mystery and death.

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Story: Bones

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Spoilers: Fire. The End.

>Disclaimer: Don't own them. Want no
money belonging to you, C. Carter, and got

>none either so if you sue me, all you'll
get is a sock full of buttons!

>*No F.B.I. Agents were hurt in
the making of this story.

>Summary: Mulder and Scully solve
and old case the MulderTorture way.

>
BONES.

>When the floor gave way beneath her feet, her arms flailed out in every
direction in hopes of preventing what her plunging stomach told her. That she

>was falling.
It was an instinctive move but there was nothing to break her fall. There

>wasn't anything, really, she could do but fall.
That and latch onto Mulder's arm as he fell with her.

>A long time, it seemed, they fell before coming to a dead and painful halt at
the bottom of...

>Scully coughed at the choking dust their mutual landing in a pile had caused.
It smelled old where they were. An odd clattering sound, like wood sticks in a

>rain barrel, sounded whenever she tried to move a leg or shift her weight. More
minutes elapsed before the disorientation and shock of landing passed from her

>fuzzy brain. She saw stars, little dancing sparkles in the near dark of this -
whatever it is they were. Shaft, she thought. A deep, deep shaft.

>Two in a well and who has a wish?
Scully remembered the downward

flight as but two or three seconds of actual
>air-time before her whole weight came down upon something soft under her. Well,
not soft, but softer than the rocks or hard dirt under her painful hip.

>There was one more memory that became clear to her and that was her partner
crying out as she came down hard on his knee. A crunching of bone she also

>recalled. His moans of pain had not ceased as over the seconds Scully gave her
cognitive abilities a figurative shake.

>"Mulder?" She shifted her weight, trying to lift off him and whatever in his
leg had clearly and audibly snapped in two. His answer was a yell. It was a

>straightforward scream. Short and to the point. He was hurting somewhere and it
was a bad hurt.

>"Mulder?" She eased herself up over him. It wasn't easy. The space they were
confined in was barely four feet by four feet. Unlimited headroom, however, as

>Scully glanced upward to see the open hole thirty feet above her. The walls
were too smooth for any hope of climbing out. Mulder wouldn't be attempting

>any such athletics in his present state anyway.
"Where are you hurt?"

>He was panting. Moaned. "M-my..leg..."
The one she had landed on, the one she'd been sitting on until seconds ago.

>Scully was on her hands and knees, her legs straddling his injured and his good
knee (she assumed the other one was still good), her arms on either side of his

>torso. He was laying bunched up, half on his side, his legs bent double.
Small space. Tall, badly injured man.

>Not good.
Whenever she shifted to try and get a better look, somehow she managed to

>brush against the damaged member, evoking a yelp out of him. It was simply
impossible not to touch him with such reduced square footage to work in. She

>touched the back of one hand to his face. He felt cool. Cold. Shock. And the
night was upon them.

>Scully looked at the moon, shining like silver so far above them. Tempting
her. Enough light to tease but not enough to really see. But she felt the

>perspiration on Mulder's face. She had no choice, she had to move that leg to
see how bad it was. She had to wrap it and immobilize it and how the hell was

>she going to do that?
"Where are we?" He asked, suprising her. She thought he had passed out. It

>would have been his better option. Now -
-"We're at the bottom of an old well I guess. They must have built the old

>farm house up over it. Strange that they never filled in the hole."
It was odd.

>Scully felt around for something to splint his knee with as she talked to him.
A distract tactic. Maybe it would lesson his mind's focus on the grinding bones

>that used to be his left knee. "I wonder why they didn't?..." Scully stopped
her question when her hand found a long, odd shaped stick. She held it up to

>the mockingly feeble trickle of light. "Oh my god."
Mulder turned his head to follow her arm up to what was clasped in her

>fingers. "Is that what I think it is?"
"Uh huh. I think so."

>"Is that the only one?" He asked, coughing.
"No," she said as she felt around in the dark beneath them. "I thought they
>were sticks."
Mulder rested his head back again. "No, just old
stiffs, Scully. I think we've
>found where old Ellise was dumping his wives."
"Yeah. Yeah,
Mulder, we sure did." Scully heard his breathing getting rougher.

>He was in agony and she was about to bump it up a few notches.

"How are we going to get out?" Mulder asked, who was in no shape
to do any
>figuring or imaginative thinking. Scully collected herself and felt
around for
a second bone. Two thigh bones.
>Oh hear the word of the lord.
"I'm going to have to immobilize
that knee, Mulder."
>"I was afraid you'd say that."
Up to that juncture, Scully
hadn't lay a finger on him. But even now, as she
>gently, gently, ran fingers over the area, it had swelled to the
size of a
football.
>And then she felt something she didn't expect. Wetness. Sticky
stuff. "Mulder."
When he didn't answer, she checked his throat,
felt a strong, steady pulse.
>"Christ." she whispered.
"Hey, that's sacreligious." he croaked.

>"I thought you were...asleep."
"Oh, yeah, after tonight, I may
change my bedroom over to this. On second
>thought, I may just come here again tomorrow."
"Mulder, I'm
going to have to take your pants off, you're bleeding and that

>could mean compound fracture."
"Scully, when are you gonna tell
me some good news?"
>His leg was twisted at a bad angle. A not quite natural one. She
palpitated
the knee underneath to see f she could feel any jutting
bone edges. There were
>none. But she did feel a large gash through a tear in the fabric.

"How about this? I don't think the break has compounded but you
do have a deep
>cut. I have to at least immobilize the knee and wrap that cut.
You've bled
quite a bit."
>"I'm marking my territory."
"Mulder, be serious." He sighed.
Exhausted. Pretty soon he'd be unconscious and
>unable to help her with the first task at hand.
"Come on, let's
get these pants off you. And not one smart remark or I'm
>leaving you here."
"Who me?"
>As she fumbled at his belt loop and unzipped his fly he stayed
politely quiet.
When her fingers took hold of his waist band and
tugged,...
"Will you respect
>me in the afterlife?"
Scully let out a breath. It had been
coming. After all, this was Mulder. He
>couldn't resist.
"Just help me here. Can you lift your right hip
a bit so I can pull these down?"
>He did. Just enough but soon she was sweating. And then shivering.
At night it
cooled off quickly, even in Arizona.
>As she removed his shoes and worked the slacks off each leg, "Tell
me again
why we came on this assignment?"
>"Because Kershe wanted all his most expendable drones. The locals
know this
guy did in his four wives but they just couldn't prove
it without any bodies."
>"Four wives? You'd think that information alone would be enough to
suspect the
man."
>"Well, of insanity maybe. State Police did suspect, Scully, there

was just no
proof."

>"Until now."
"I knew we'd- AAAAAHHHH!"

>Scully'd had to shift the broken limb to get the slacks finally off.

"Sorry, Mulder. Are you still with me?"

>"Do I have a choice?"
Scully assessed the damage with her fingers, cringing as she had to run a

>finger through the gash, probing it for foreign objects, and wincing at his
scream when she did.

>She could feel a bump on her head and it throbbed. And her own muscles were
stiffening up from the shock of falling and then stopping!

>"I have to wrap and splint now. But it's going to hurt, Mulder. It's going to
hurt as lot."

>"Don't worry about me, Scully, just do it."
She did it.

>Amidst some shrieks and long groans of the worst kind that any doctor - or
partner - would ever want to hear issue forth from a patient.

>But the thing was done. It was crude and there was probably dirt in the wound,
but it was the best care she could give him under the circumstances.

>"I can't feel my foot, Scully."
Oh Jesus. "You mean it fell asleep, or is it completely numb?"

>"N-not s-sure.." He was shivering, his teeth chattering.
Well, what did you expect, Doctor, he laying in a well in his underwear.

>Scully shimmied out of her overcoat, and after wrapping his own around him as
best she could, she sat with her legs bridged over his hips and threw her own

>around her shoulders, taking care that it also covered as much of him as
possible.

>Neither of them were going to get much sleep that night.
"Are you listening, Mulder? You need to stay awake if you can, okay? I'm sure

>they'll find this old shack eventually, and us."
"Mmmm.

...'kay."

>He was silent for a few moments except for his laboured breathing.

"Scully?"
"Yeah?"

>"Who do you suppose is hugging my knee right now?"
That made her nauseous. "I don't know, Mulder. Ellise wife number two?"

>"Yeah, well, she really needs to put on some weight. Do you think they'll find
us?"

>"Of course. They know the general area where we were looking. They have to
suspect something when we don't show in a few hours."

>"Scully..."
"Yeah?"

>"I didn't tell them exactly where we were going."
"You're kidding me. Please say you're kidding me."

>"Okay, I'll say it, but it'll be a lie."
"Oh, Mulder..." She couldn't keep the exasperation out of her voice. "Why not?"

>"Because I wante dus to find Ellises Wife-Dumping ground and I had a pretty
good idea where."

>"If you knew where then why did we fall into it?"
"I knew pretty much where, not exactly. I figure it'd be BEHIND the house.

>Garden, under the When the shack, something like that."
"You better hope someone on the team thinks like you do, Mulder, or this case

>just may end up our last."

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>like that."
"You better hope someone on the team thinks like you
do,

>Mulder, or this case just may end up our last."
"Mulder?"

>The faintest glow from the morning sun was a blessedly
welcome
light.

>Today they would be found.
They'd call in the dogs -

>It would take them hours to transport the hounds up
here from the
nearby collection of hovels that passed

>for a town. Unless they brought them in by chopper.
- they'd be
found.

>"Mulder?"
Scully felt the side of his face in the still near
dark.

>He was very cold. Even in his sleep or unconscious state,
he
shivered. Fumbling with a collar button, she slid a

>hand beneath his shirt. In there, anywhere where his body
was not
assaulted by the night chill, he was burning up.

>This was not good.
"Mulder?" She shook him. Hated to do it. He
was in so much

>pain the minutes he was awake, it soon drove him to seek
out
blissful unawareness again. Mind's retreat due to body's

>hurting onslaught.
Finally he stirred. But he said nothing, the
gasps of pain

>and freezing cold in his exposed limbs and skin told her
what she
needed to know. "Mmmmm..?"

>"I need you to sit up, Mulder."
Faint whisper from below, "Too
sick."

>"You have to. You have to keep awake, Mulder. You're
running a
high fever. And you've been lying on that

>cold ground all night."
"All night? Where are we?"

>"We're still in the well."
Coughing weakly, "Think U2'll write a

song about us?"

>"Come on." She linked her arms around his back and
pulled until he was sitting upright, more or less.

>Scully helped him settle back against the rough rock
wall. He gasped.

>"What?"
"Pain, shooting up my leg -AHH!" When she lay her palm

>gently on his damaged joint.
"It hurts even when I touch it like that?"

>"Yeah. Weird hurt."
"How "weird"?"

>"Can-can't really feel anything below my thigh, but
when you touch it,..like fire, knives."

>Shit. Infection.
Numb leg. Swelling maybe pinching off nerves, blood vessels.

>Big fucking problem sitting there beside her in the
misty dawn.

>"I'm sure they'll figure out where we went." She said with
only a tad more conviction than she felt. The values, however,

>were scarcely opposed.
"I'm sorry."

>"Don't worry. I should have anticipated you'd neglect to tell
the S.A.I.C. where we were going. After six years..."

>"I said I was sorry." His voice was fading.
"Mulder? Stay awake. Mulder!"

>"I'm 'wake-I'm 'wake.."
"Stay that way. I want you alert."

>"Why?"
Why??

>Scully wondered herself.
Maybe because she didn't like the ghostly pale

>face looking back at her from inside a cold, dark
place that could easily become their grave.

>Perhaps because she couldn't bear the idea of slipping
into that last rest without being able to speak with

>him - with Mulder, and listen to him speak back - until
the last possible moment of their mutually weird lives.

>"Because I want you to be the one to explain to Kershe
where the hell we spent last night. I am not taking the

>fall for this THIS time."
Mulder was silent but Scully could tell by his quick

>regular breaths he was staying awake. Maybe he, too,
was nervous about going to sleep.

>"Scully?"
"Yeah?"

>"I really want to thank you."
"For what?"

>"For always being there. For helping me out of
some tough spots. For...for being who you are

>and for what you've become to me."
Scully considered a dozen possible responses but

>her throat had suddenly tightened up. Damn him!
"Thank me when we get out of here."

>"I need to say it now. there's some things I have
to tell you-"

>"-Mulder, they can wait." She said it as gently as
possible but in her no nonsense doctors voice that

>kept all emotions at bay until a suitable time could be
arranged for laying them out and pulling them apart

>to see why they ticked.
"No. Can't wait..."

>"Why not, we'll be out of here any time now, Mulder.
Any time."

>"Because I can't stay awake and I'm afraid that..."
She sucked in a breath.

>"...that if I don't tell you, I'll never get another
chance."

>"Mulder..."
"Scully, please don't be that way. This is important
>to me."
She went quiet, terrified of his unspoken words that
>would soon be revealed and then have to be dealt with.
Words that
maybe, in his delirium, he didn't really
>mean. Things he might not remember or if he someday
did, would
cause shame for them both.
>Words that could change everything forever. And maybe
not to the
happiness of either of them.
>"I really care about you, Scully. You've been my...
my partner
and my friend. You-you never let me down.
>Not even once. Not really. Not where it matter-r-red."
Scully
heard his chattering teeth.
>"That means a lot to me. I wish,...I wish...I could
make it up to
you somehow."
>"You have, Mulder."
"No, not the way I wanted to. Not the way
you would have
>liked anyway I guess..."
What was he talking about?
>She heard him swallow. Prelude to a biggie.
"I guess I'm trying
to tell you how much I care and I
>wish I could have the opportunity to prove it."
"Prove it by
living."
>He was breathing very heavily. Something was hurting
somewhere.
His leg. Head. Places that, though his
>nerve endings couldn't register, it was still making it
to his
brain. His mind was telling him he was in agony.
>"I don't...th-think that's going to be an option,
Scully.
S...sorry..."
>Scully wrapped her arms around him. God - his skin
was SO cold!
"Don't you leave me yet, partner. I expect
>you to make it up to me. Get it? Every last damn
debt owed. You
hearing me? You are NOT off the hook!"
>Silence.
"Mulder?!" She checked his pulse. Thready.
>Weak.
No.
>"MULDER!!"
A soft sigh, then, "How come, Scully?"
>"How come what?" Don't you fucking leave me!
"How come you
walked away?"
>"I don't understand. When?"
"When I told you how I felt, you
just walked
>away."
Oh, Christ! The hospital. Bermuda. He remembered?
>All of that? He....meant it??
"Mulder, don't go to sleep. Don't.
Just don't.
>Fight it!"
"Don't you ever get tired of being alone?"
>YES! "Everyone does, Mulder."
He sighed. Ragged breath that must
have hurt
>both ways. "I am."
"Then stay with me."
>"Trying...you didn't answer me."
Because I was so goddamn
relieved you were alive I
>wanted to fucking cry my eyes out and scream at
you for almost
leaving ME!! You selfish asshole!
>Don't you know I fucking love you too??!! But if I
say it, it
becomes REAL. And then if you left me
>again, permanently - as in DIED - then I wouldn't
survive it
myself! THAT'S fucking why!!
>"I think I feel like that too,..." Tell him what he
wants to
hear. Tell him the truth and get through
>this, get his ass to a hospital, bring 'em back
alive and things
can go back to normal for a while.

>No danger of drowning inside his passionate soul
for another few weeks. "But we need to speak of this
>some other time, Mulder. If I promise you, promise to
talk to you about it, will you promise me to stay awake?
>Will you promise me to live through this?"
"It's a deal."

>Scully slumped against him. Rubbing him. Warming him
the tiniest bit.

>Mulder. You crazy, impulsive, risk-taking, rule-
breaking, annoying, arrogant, perfect, loving son-of-

>a-bitch.
How the hell did you make me love you?

>
During the heat of the Arizona day, it warmed somewhat around her

>body, thereby her body warming his somewhat. But not quite
enough.

>They were, after all, thirty feet below the surface of the earth and down
there it stayed on the cool side.

>It was an odd combination of two things. As cool as a late September
morning and as dry as ...bones.

>Upon which they sat, though Scully had shoved them to one side.

Mulder hadn't roused by the time the sun reached its zenith.

>She was very afraid, now, that he wouldn't. Rubbing his arms and
his sides until her arms burned with fatigue, she'd settled in, hoping

>someone on the Search Team would think about the canyon over,
and the run-down shack that still stood up under the weather of

>an Arizona desert after fifty years of abandonment.
Sunlight strained to reach her from high above. It streamed in

>through the house's glassless windows and sagging, much holed
roof.

>Which would not keep out the rain should their luck hold and it
poured on them tonight.

>"mmmmmm."
"Mulder?" He was stirring a little. Slumped against her but sitting

>up and, in that position, feigning a modicum of health.
"Hey." She encouraged by taking his flopping head in her hand,

>cupping a palm under his stubbled chin. "Hey, partner. It's about
time you got up."

>But he was still hot. In fact, too hot.

Should-be-in-the-hospital-
under-a-cooling-blanket-and-being-pumped -full-of-tylenol,-fluids-

>and-antibiotics hot.
"Dad's gonna kill me."

>"Huh?" Scully rubbed his cheek. It seemed to restore a bit of colour
but not word sense.

>"We - I was suppose to be home by midnight. He's gonna be soooo
pissed!"

>Dreaming.
"But I don't care." Stubborn, teenage inflection. Fifteen years old?

>No way!
Seventeen, Scully guessed.

>Just before being shipped off to England as the duty of parents
who no longer loved each other and could spare little for their

>starving son.
Or sent away because of guilt.

>Couldn't look the son in the eye anymore when he talked about the missing
sibling with anguished, angry expressions and puzzled glances at their

>never-to-be-forthcoming answers.
Silent, cold guilt of the Father.

>Declaration of innocence of the Mother.
And a son who lost not

only his sister on a chilled November night when he
>was twelve, but his parents as well.
"Mulder..?" She wanted to
bring him out of it. Felt a twang of conscience
>for listening in on what must have been a private matter. When
you're
seventeen, the world revolved around looking cool.
>"I forgot!" Mulder mumble-yelled. "No! No, I won't! you never do!
You
don't give a shit about me...."
>"Hey." Scully patted his cheek, now. He was delirious with fever. He
was
very, very sick and this was only going to exhaust him further.
"Hey,
>Mulder. Come on, now."
Wherever Mulder was, he wasn't listening
to his partner.
>There were other things to hear...
"I did not! I didn't..."
Mulder's face scrunched up and he whined just
>a little. "You're a liar."
No tears but he sounded like he was
crying. "I hate you!"
>His breathing accelerated until he was gasping. He'd spent
whatever
reserves of energy his sleep had brought.
>Scully could do nothing but let him hyperventilate until he passed
out.
Prayed he would again awaken when the demons of his dreams
went
>to sleep themselves.
She herself was feeling the telltale
effects of shock.
>The fall, the strained muscles, the lack of sleep, food
and
water. They'd only been down the hole for she guessed
>eighteen hours.
Scully checked her watch and it had stopped some
time ago.
>Mulder was oscillating between consciousness and sleep. His
body
gave off waves of fever-heat one moment and shook with
>chills the next.
But she was helpless to prevent his further
slide into death.
>If they didn't get help soon she, too, would be on that
last
train out of the station.
>"Scully..."
Holy shit. She continued to hug him close and warm
his
>cheek with her hand. The sun had travelled across the sky
while
she watched it jealously, to be free to move like
>that, and furiously, that it wouldn't spare them a ray or
two of
real warmth.
>"Mulder? You awake?"
"Sort of. I think...I think I hear
something..."
>She let her ears and mind search the stillness. "What?"

"Voices..."
>Her heart sank. Fever. Sickness. Infection gone into
the blood
and poisoning that acute mind. "Mulder, no..."
>I think you're dreaming."
"These women. Elises's wives, they're
talking to me.
>Telling me something but I can't quite hear..."
Scully's heart
sank. He was that close to joining them?
>"These are just bones, Mulder. Those women are just
dry bones in
a well, now. They can't talk to you."
>"They are, Scully." He trembled and his breathing was
so faint
now.
>Scully nodded, indulging in the freedom to speak gently
and
freely with him, now that she was sure he was
>slipping away from her forever.
"What are they saying?" she
asked, her cheek tight
>against his so he would feel life - her pulsing life
and heart -
against him right until that very last
>second.
So he would know how much she would miss him. How

>much she cared, how much they'd been through together
to bring them to this moment.
>So he would know it always.
"They're saying, asking me something, I think. Telling
>me to dig."
"Dig?" Her mind caught the word up and looked at it

>straight on.
"Yeah."
>How did he manage to turn a perfectly ordinary case
into an X-File? Always? Consistently?
>Every damn time?
"Dig for what, Mulder, we have nothing to dig with."
>"Use a bone. Break one, use the sharp end."
She was a pathologist. She sawed people open and took
>out their organs, measured them weighed them, talked
about them into a little recorder, dumped them all back
>in and sewed them up again like garmets. It was so
medieval. Really, as facinating as it could be, it was
>gross.
All that in her experience yet the thought of snapping

>one of those women's bones in two and using it like a
kid's shovel turned her stomach.
>"I don't know how long I can do that, or how deep I'm
going to get, this ground is pretty hard. What am I
>digging for?"
"Ummph,..hope, I think...hope." Mulder faded into sleep
>to listen to the murmmuring of the ghosts that were haunting
him.

>Scully watched him close his eyes. Still felt his breath
on her cheek.

>God must be listening to her.
Scully's "shovel" soon hit something soft and maelable. It moved around
>in the dirt like a coiled snake.
"Jesus."
>It was a coil of rope. Rope! She tugged and it came away with a bit
of effort, but sure as hell, she'd uncovered a very long length of thick rope.
>In the very dry conditions of the arid landscape, it hadn't even a
hint of rot.
>Scully glanced over at Mulder in the dim well of their souls. He appeared
to be asleep. The delusion or dream of his illness, manifesting
>itself as a psychic episode, had somehow allowed his motoring brain to
come up with the answer; the wives had been hung and the rope of their demise
>had been dumped into their unkind grave with them.
Therefor no blood or trace evidence had been found. the methods of law

>enforcement
during the 40's would be less scientific perhaps, less accurate but not less
>enthusiastic or thorough.
No bodies, no evidence, no laying of charges possible. Rumors had been that
>Elise
had been a hard and calous man. No woman in her right mind would have stayed
>with him for long. Four wives and all leaving within the first two years of
marriage
>may have been shocking, but in the case of a man who was anything but charming,
not necessarily suspicious.
>Bones. Rope. He'd probably burned the clothing and any identification. Obviously
not a stupid man. Maybe he'd grown tired of killing or tired of women or

>just tired and old, but he'd stopped murdering his wives, dumping them in his
well,
>and then sometime later had built himself a new house to ever hide the
evidence of his
>treachery before he sold the place.
A neat little feat. Who would be willing to move a whole house to look for a

>corpse?
Dig in a basement maybe, but there were few foundations needed on such rocky
>ground. It was not out of place in this area and not unusual fifty years ago.
The well
>had probably been hand-dug and no records of it's appearance on his land
recorded.
>Scully measured the thick coils with her eye. About fifty feet. Elise must
have hung
>his dear soon to be departed from the rafters of his former residence.
Delightful.
>This was unbelievable luck.
"Mulder. Wake up!" she had an idea.

>"Hmm?"
"We may be able to get out of here, or me at least so I can go for help."
>"Tired, scully."
She quickly checked his pulse and his face. Fast and thready. Face was cooling.
>"Stay with me, partner."
So faint, like the flutter of a butterfly's wing, "Hey..." he said, the word
>almost
not there.
>Scully stopped short of her manipulations with the rope. Her heart thumped
painfully. Oh God....
>She touched him, hands on his face, cheek against his. "Mulder. come on.
Don't do this, not when we're so close. We're almost free. Come on, Mulder,
>come on..."
But he was not waking up again.
>His eyes stayed shut against the encouragment of her words. Slumped in
her arms bonelessly.
>"Ohhhh, f-fuuuuck..."
She hated to do it, wanted to stay and be there for the last time.
>But if she moved there might BE no last time. There might be a next time, a
next day. Time enough to say what she should have said and do what she
>should have done.
However, just in case it was too late, just in case he was taken away while
>she was seperated from his beautiful life of the present...

"Mulder, I love you too, okay. You remember that, partner, wherever you're
>going. But don't leave unless you have no choice. Only ride with the wind
when you've set your sail. Okay?" She couldn't stop the tears when still
>she received no answer. "M-my dad used to say that." She offered.

But he slept on and his breath was fading to tiny puffs against her wet
>cheekbone.
Quickly, Scully gathered up a collection of the longest bones in the pile
>which shared their tiny domain. She tied one end of the rope around
them and knotted it tightly.
>Then got to her feet, shaking with fatigue and maybe the inevitable that
lay at her feet, life exhaling away with each small breath.

>Scully coiled the long end in one hand, and swinging the jumble of tied up
bones two, three times, she flung it skyward.
>And missed the hole by inches.
Scully tried again, this time her

makeshift grappling hook

>brushed the edge of the hole, teetered there for a second
before plunging back down to her.

>She caught it with upstretched hands to keep it from striking
her in the head or landing on Mulder who could take no more

>abuse.
She was tiring quickly and her arms were cramped and shaking

>with effort. "This time,..." she told herself aloud. "This time, Dana..."
She flung it mightily and it disappeared over the lip of the

>opening. She almost shouted with the tiny victory. The damn
deep and cold shaft and the damn desert night and the damn

>dead woman's bones who had mocked her since their imprisonment
in their loveless tomb would not be inaugurating any new members

>today.
Scully slowly and very carefully, tugged on the rope.

Hoping against

>all reasonableness that Louise's or Margrette's or Edith's bones
would become tangled up or lodged against the splintered two by

>sixes that made up the flooring of the tumbled down shack that once
protected and nurtured life, not death.

>Scully felt resistance and tugged a bit harder. Strong resistance.
The tiniest bit harder, she pulled. It didn't move.

>What did Mulder call it? Blind luck.
Scully turned and knelt down to check once more on the reason of her

>most recent desperation. He was still breathing. Very shallowly. Barely
moving chest. "Okay, Mulder, I hate to do it but I have to go. I'm getting

>you out of here one way or another. I just hope this rope holds."

She didn't ask how he knew and what did it matter? "You wait here for

>me." And don't listen to those women's bones if they start calling you
again! She took his worn face between her hands and kissed his lips

>once quickly. "I'll be back."
Scully stood, grabbed the rope between spitted palms, and hauled herself

>upwards, inch by inch. Her arms ached. Her shoulders screamed. But
she kept going. Last chance maneuver. Thank god for the

exercises.
Thank god for the hours on the treadmill and the weight benches.

But the hole seemed miles overhead.

>And safety still deadly hours off.
She could feel the heat now, as the desert sun,

>even in it's late afternoon position, sent its
blanketing waves over her skin.

>Mulder, down below, would be shivering
in the chill of the underground world where

>his flesh grew stiffer and his blood sicker.
Scully scrambled over the edge of the splintered

>wood, ignoring the splinters that worked their
way into her knees. She called back down.

>"Mulder! I'm going for help. You hang on.
You hang on or I will forget every nice thing

>you ever did for me!"
There was no answer.

>Now that she was up and free, she wanted
to be back down there, checking his pulse,

>rubbing his frozen limbs, hugging him close.
"Mulder! I'm going!"

>It was the feeling of cutting away. Letting go
of a life-line.

Prayers for his well-being ran
>through her head and heart as she stumbled
out of the tumbled
down shack and squinted into
>the setting sun. Which way?
She tried to get her bearings. Had
the sun been
>behind them when she'd followed Mulder here..
>yesterday - no -
almost two days previously?
>Unsure, Scully set off for the rise to the west,
directly into
the Arizona fire in the sky that had
>refused them its life-sustaining heat for so long.
If this guess
was wrong and upon reaching that rise,
>she saw no Search Team, no F.B.I. base camp, she
will have lost
precious and irretreivable minutes.
>Minutes that could be better served saving her
partner's life.

>No one would have come looking here, she thought
as her aching
feet somehow moved one in front of
>the other. The spot having been thoroughly
investigated decades
before and again just after
>the arrival of the Investigative team, there was
no need, it'd
had been decided.
>But Mulder didn't feel satisfied, he'd said.
That should have
been enough to warn her.
>Her Mulder Alert should have gone off the deep
end at that
pronouncement.
>Mulder playing a hunch.
Sources indicated that Elise had most
likely
>disposed of his wives somewhere within his
longtime residence in
the valley toward which
>she hoped she was weaving, and not inside his
newly built little
home in the other desert
>valley which he'd occupied for only a few weeks
before
disappearing.
>Since the wives of Elise had disappeared years
before the place
had seen it's first hammer and
>nail...
But Mulder had had a feeling.
>Only Mulder would have suspected such an unlikely
site to
investigate and have it turn out to be
>correct.
Just as only Mulder would pick the right building

>for a huge bomb.
Only Mulder would get locked inside a room with

>a ticking Coke machine.
Only Mulder would find a hole of dead
woman's bones
>- the one hole nobody knew about in an old shack
already checked
for evidence long ago and that same
>day too - and then fall in that hole!
Only Mulder would take a
stab in the dark and be
>infuriatingly right.
Only mulder would find a way to die from a
broken
>knee.
Just him.
>He'd survived worse, Scully thought to herself.
But there was
only one of him and she'd become
>so goddamn tied up in him, she felt she'd lose her
way in life if
he was no longer in it.
>Six years ago, she'd gotten her first taste of
Mulder.
>He was a craving now.
It was the easier thing to think.

>Easier than the fragility of loving him.
Scully found herself at
the rise of the brush freckled

>dune. The other side, the tiny valley contained.
No living beings.

>She almost wailed. Dropped and sobbed. Almost.
She'd gone the wrong way. "It's just a broken knee

>Mulder. That's all. For god's sake, just a stupid
broken knee and a cut. And from that, you're finding

>a way to die on me! You bastard!"
Scully turned around angry and furious. Failure was

>not an option either of them could afford.
Exhaustion made little mirages swim before her eyes

>as she started back down the dune, the sand slipping
out from under her shoes like ballbearings and making

>it harder to walk. Each step became harder as extreme
fatigue overtook her.

>She fell.
Stayed down for a moment.

>"No." She said to herself. And to the strange ghostly
figures who circled her, whispering.

>They said things. Bad things, terrible things. Things
about him, things he'd done that made her heart

>hurt. Things he'd said that healed it.
They talked of him and then one addressed her.

>Just halucination, she reminded her doctor-self.
Scully closed her ears to all of it and wept on the

>sand when one pointed its shaking index at her. It
was the accusation of the dead and it was a warning.

>Scully listened to its convincing voice that was
no voice but words in her won head.

>Take life, it said. Accept what is before you.
Living flesh and blood. Bone and heart. Don't waste

>another second. Stop wondering. Time.
Time, Dana.

>Time is the ally and the enemy.
Scully nodded at the long, white, dead hand thrusting

>out to her.
And then took it. The ghost helped her rise and sent

>her stumbling on her way up the other dune.
She fell and rolled down the other side.

>**
Spender spoke into his walkie-talkie:

>"No. No sign at all in sector G. Sir, they must have
left with the last helicopter team. Can't we contact

>the pilot?"
Skinner's direct bluntness answered back: "We've

>tried that, Agent Spender. They're out of range.
Mulder might leave unannounced, but I doubt

>Scully would."
Spender shook his head, peeved, knowing Skinner

>could not see his disagreement. "But isn't she rather
under Mulder's thumb, sir? Wouldn't she just roll

>if her asked her to?"
"You can stow that opinion, Spender. They're the

>finest Agents this department has to offer and until
we locate them, not one damn member of this team

>gets to go home to Hamburger Helper, do I make myself
clear!?"

>"Yes, sir."

>It was so cold here.
He was so cold. His legs had numbed hours ago, the

>blood on his left thigh had dried to a sticky coating.
Hardened glaze on his frozen flesh.

>The trenchcoats provided little warmth. Scully had
left hers for him when she'd gone.

>He couldn't remember the reason why she did. But
it must be important because Scully didn't leave him.
Scully would never just abandoned him. Just leave.

>Would she?
Once, yes, she almost did.

>"Salt Lake City, Utah. Transfer effective immedietly."
"You can't quit now."

>"Yes, I can. I have, it's done."
"I need you on this one, Scully!"

>"You don't need me, Mulder..."
"YES I DO!" He tried to call to her but his voice was

>dry and cracked like the desert that lay somewhere up above. It hurt.
He coughed. Hollowed out, dry, feeble sound that didn't even reach the walls

>of his pit.
He gasped. Things seemed to be collapsing in on him.

>The walls of his hole, the air around him, his aching
flesh.

>Memories...
Once upon a time, he did not know her at all.

>Once upon a time, he was alone, like he was now, in a
cold unforgiving world that held no place for him. One that didn't seem to

>mind that he was being ground under it's cruel heel.
That was pain.

>Being alone in the crush of humanity and mocked by their appearant ease at
fitting in.

>Phoebe had fit him into her version of warmth. And for a little while, he
believed her reality was he true one.

>Just a stupid kid who had no idea what he was getting into.
She soon brought it to his stark attention just what reality was. Reality was

>a fist in the gut.
It was rejection at the first sign of being imperfect and vulnerable. Things

>Phoebe Green could not tolerate for a moment.
Then reality was VCU. Violent Crimes.

>Couldn't get anymore real than that, right? Not in a world full of atrocities
that would make God consider cancelling all plans for the Second Coming.

>VCU was insanity disguised as a job.
Sleepless nights, dreams that would curl what little hair Dean Koontz had

>left, enough tears to fill a couple of buckets to the rim and a weekly paycheck.
He'd rejected that reality as fast as he could when Reality number Three

>>walked into his life dressed in her shamelessly expensive panysuit.

Diana had made him believe in her version with a few well placed gropings and

>some serious promises of "them". "We" she'd said. "Us", "You and me".
And he was so eager for the emptyness to be vanquished, he'd succomed like the

>sucker her was.
Fell in love, even.

>And then she showed him by tossing the ring back in his face that love was
also an illusion.

>TrustNo1.
So much easier on the vital organs like the guts and the penis and the heart.

>Believe in yourself. Believe in the truth.
Truth. The only sanctum left.

>The only one he allowed himself for quite some time.
Being alone sucked ugly, hairy ones. It blew toxic chunks.

>But it was safer. How much pounding can one poor sap take anyway?

Then Scully came and all that shit, all that pain and heartache and self-

>deluding crap about freedom and truth and Quests, all kind of took a back seat.
Soon, she had made almost all of it go away.

>He woke up feeling good. Looking forward to going into the office. seeing her.
Happy for the first time in twenty-two years.

>God, he loved her for that. Loved her period.
Where was she? He was so cold.

>She should know that. Should know that he wasn't going to be able to wait for
her much longer. The cold seeped into him. His body heat dissapating. His pilot

>light.
Was going out.

>God, he was cold. God, he loved her.
Where was Scully?

>Spender set out with little enthusiasm. It was
damn hot.

>Evening or no, the sand had soaked up the sun
for ten hours and he could feel the burn of it

>through the soles of his shoes.
It wasn't that he hated Mulder. He didn't.

>In fact, he respected the man. Tough not
to respect someone who had lost pretty well

>everything and could still snark out the arrogance
like he owned D.C..

>It was a good defensive technique. He'd used it
himself on occassion.

>But Mulder was not known to be a team player and
if he'd taken off on some hunch or other or simply

>because he didn't like this particular dumpy assignment,
well,..then he had it coming. "It" being whatever.

>Reprimand.
Or lost and just a little thirsty would suffice.

>Might do him some good. Knock him down a peg
or two.

>He'd walked about a mile, carefully tracking
his direction and distance. The area had been searched

>by the entire team the first day. Routine coverage of
an unsuspected site. It was one that had been gone over

>years before as well. Neither times had anything been
turned up on Ellise's possible whereabouts or his

>victims remains.
No reason to go there again. None.

>Except his feet had just kept on carrying him in
that direction and what the hell, what would it hurt?

>Third time charmed.
Spender played facts out to their conlcusions, he covered

>all bases.
He did not guess or get "feelings". Hunches were

>untrustworthy unless initially supported by fact or facts.
Yet...

>... his legs kept going there, taking him ever closer to
an unnecessary destination.

>Spender frowned at himself. And at his feet and their
insistence on not only moving that way but picking

>up pace.
The desert could be a place of mystery, he supposed.

>And he was tired after all. Not thinking straight.
Spender caught the movement of a animal. Desert

>creature. Lots of them and this time of evening was
about the time they began their roamings for food.

>"Oooaahhh." A low, painful sound.
Spender stopped short and squinted into the dusky
>grey that was quickly falling over the blushed hills.
That had not sounded like any animal.
>He switched on his powerful flashlight beam and
trained it on the now unmoving form.
>Red glinted in it's circle of illumination. White skin
in twisted, dark material.
>"Oh my god."

>"I've found them!" He spoke into his Walkie-Talkie.
Urgently. When no answer came forth instantly, he
>spoke again, louder. Insistant. "Did you hear me?!
This is Agent Spender! I've found them. Or one of
>them. Agent Scully is injured. We need immediate
medical Evac'. Over!"
>"Where are you Agent Spender?"
Skinner's voice. Finally!

>"I'm.." He got his bearings. "...due west about a mile
and a quarter. Near the second house. the secondary site."
>"We'll have a chopper in A.S.A.P.. What is Agent
Scully's
condition?"
>Spender had gone to her. She was semi-conscious. She
looked
shocky.
>"Uncertain." Checked her pulse. "Shocky, I think. She might
have internal injuries."
>She moaned and stirred. "No, well..."
Spender shook his head, tried to keep her still as she was
>struggling to get her elbows under her. "Agent Scully, just
lie still. You're not well. Evac's on its way."
>"No." She pushed against his hands. "No!" Her voice stronger
and her hands pushed his away. "No, Mulder. The well."
>"Where is Mulder?" He mentally kicked himself. For worrying
about her, he'd not considered the second missing Agent.
>Scully pointed in the direction of the Ellise dwelling.
"Back
there. Under the house. The floor. A well was UNDER the

>house. Mulder, we both, fell in. Mulder, he's..bad.
V....very bad." Scully had to gasp out each word on a whole
>breath.
Spender assisted her to stand since she seemed
determined to
>do so anyway, with or without his help.
"Come with me." she said and staggered, half running back the
>way she had come.
Spender informed Skinner as he caught up. Putting away his
>radio, he took one of her arms and slung it over his
shoulder.
"Thanks, Spender." She said.
>***
Soon, lights, people and equipment were crowded into the
former occupants
>tumble down shack, all trying vainly to see down a
black hole.

>Scully was at the very heart of it all.
All this concern for one reputed crazy agent. The "lost cause".
>The "has-been". The Spook.
She was never more glad in her life to have seen Jeffrey Spender.
>The weasling little son-of-a-bitch had come through and just
maybe
in the nick of time. The last person she had expected to see.
>Perhaps he wasn't just one of Smokie's Go-Boys. But she
wasn't
going to bet on it just yet.
>"MULDERRRR!" She yelled down the hole.
Suddenly all murrmers

around her went silent as they were
>greeted with the same from below.
"MULDER! Can you hear me?!"
Please! You better not be dead you
>gorgeous ditching prick!
Nothing.
>"Someone lower me down." Spender announced and removed
his
trench coat. Standard F.B.I. wear, it seemed even in the plus

>one hundred degrees.
Mulder had two draped over him down there,
and down there it
>was perhaps fifty.
"No." Scully said. "I have to be the one."

>Skinner said:
"Absolutely not. You're already injured. Spender
goes, he's-"

>"Sir! I'm the only one who knows his condition. Now lower me
down
with an extra harness. I'll get it on him, and then haul
>him out. When I left him, he was barely holding on so there's
no
time to discuss this." Scully flashed back.

>Skinner looked at her only for a second before nodding. "Go."

>"Mulder."
Scully's voice.

>He knew it.
Like he knew how his own heartbeat sounded when he
had his

>ear pressed into a pillow.
Like he knew his own soul. It would
spring to life when he

>heard his name in that voice. Wrapped up in her that held
such
power and warmth over him. His only tenderness and his
>tower of strength.
Scully.

>Scully bent over him. He was white and cold. But still
breathing.
The relief she felt was indescribable. The tiny

>hope of his continued life was an ocean of joy swallowing her
in
it's agitation. She stroked his cheek. Whispered, "Hey
>partner."
His eyes - incredibly! - his eyes opened and looked
straight

>at her.
"Nice to see you." He said back, the words mouthed
rather than

>said. He had no voice. No strength for it.
"We're going to get
you out of here now. Okay?"

>A tiny nod, a frown from pain somewhere in his limbs, torso.
Both
probably.

>"I'm in."

>Spender, Skinner,..half a dozen agents hauled on the
rope
harness. Mulder was dead weight. Spender, first in line
>by randomness, kept his eye on the rope as it raked along
the lip
of the hole. It would not do for it to fray and snap.

>But the thing had been manufactured with rough terrain in mind and
held
well.

>Mulder's slumped form rose out of the darkness like a corpse from
the deep.
It crept Spender out, seeing those splayed arms,
dangling like appendages

>with no purpose. Under the beams of the torches held up by obliging
agents,
Spender could see the mussed hair. Then the dirtied shirt.

>They layed Mulder out.
Spender stepped away.

>He stepped back to make room for Scully as the other agents returned
to
their second task of hauling her out. It never occurred to him
to help this

>time around. He couldn't lift his arms. Couldn't move his
feet.
He couldn't get his eyes off Mulder.

>Such white flesh. No color at all.
Real, blood-letted,
tissue-infected sickness. Seventy-five dollar shirt.

>Filthy and torn.
No pants.
>Bloody knee wrapped up in material. Maybe the pants.
Knee splinted with ...with...someone's goddamn mother-fucking bones!

>Bones. "Jesus". He whispered, no one hearing him.
Dead broken bones holding together living broken bones.
>Back to the death-face. Still breathing deadman called Mulder, Fox.

F.B.I. Agent.
>Former Division Head of the X-Files.
Skin on skull. Blue veins. Bruises. Scratches. Cuts.
>Broken bones. Blood.
Spender felt his own blood drain. He did and wondered at it. One minute
>he figured he must have looked okay and the next he must not have because
Skinner was staring. Staring at him staring at Mulder.
"Are you all right, Agent
>Spender?"
Yes, his blood had drained - whoosh! - like down a pipe. "Uh...yeah. I've
>just...
never seen..."
>"Never seen an injured Agent before? Never seen one of your own..."
Skinner nodded to Mulder's barely aliveness, "like this?"

>Spender nodded. Recalled his words.
Mulder had had something coming.
>But not this. Not fucking this!
"You never get used to it, you know." Skinner offered.
>Somehow, that didn't make him feel better. "He could die." Was the
only stupid thing that came out of his mouth.
>"Not if we can help it." Skinner watched his youngest agent. Green
around the gills. Green as the hills. "Spender. Check on the Evac' chopper."
>Spender looked confused for a second and then nodded, quickly assuming
responsibile, everyday F.B.I. tasks again. "Yes, sir."

>Skinner watched Scully struggle out of the hole and over to Mulder. She
was bad off but she was the best qualified to keep Mulder alive while
>they played the shitty game of waiting for help. He looked back at
Spender, who'd retreated a few steps more. He looked guilty.

>Skinner thought that perhaps something here in this whole situation
had gotten to Spender. Gotten into him. Under his skin. Into his psyche
>and soul. Spender had just had his first real taste of the dangers
assumed in his chosen profession.
>He'd just walked the mile. He's been eye to eye with the Reaper
and realised it could have come for him just as well.

>All go the same course, the spooky and the mundane. The popular
and the scorned. He'd just transformed from Jeffrey Spender, F.B.I
>Agent into Agent Spender. It sounded the same. It was not.

Skinner knew. He'd walked that mile once a long time ago. When you
>see your first friend - or nameless associate - die. When you see their
blood spill. Or even when you see one not yet dead but dying, as Mulder
>was now.
Graduation Day.
>"What about that chopper Agent Spender?" Skinner
stood next to him.
>He himself was useless. To Scully and Mulder.
They all were.

>Scully was almost useless, or so she had muttered under her
breath while he'd been leaning over to help her tuck a balled up
>coat someone had donated under Mulder's hot head.
Sotto-voce', "I'm useless to him out here", she had said.
>"It's about two hours away, sir."
Skinner felt a sudden urge to growl. "Why the hell so long?"
>Spender looked over to where Scully was knelt down and
bent over, her mouth next to Mulder's ear. She was speaking to him.
>Quiet and, he sensed, private things.
Words only long-time partners shared. Things said only two who
>completely trusted each other would have the need to say. And the
courage.
>Something he had yet to experience.
"They had a priority summon. Some dignitary needed an emergency
>flight to New York. They've contacted them and have turned it around
but it'll be two hours. That's if they don't have to stop and refuel. no
>other details." At Skinner's blood suffused face, "Someone getting
injured on such a routine maneuver,...it just wasn't a contingency anyone
>remorely looked at." He made no excuses for Bureau inefficiency, he
was just reporting the facts. Hated them none-the-less.

>Skinner fumed silently for a few seconds.
Spender thought too. "What about a commercial craft? What about
>private? Maybe there's someone in the air closer to our location? Can't
we try that?"
>Skinner nodded with quick approval. " Send it out on every channel.
Emphasize who we are, get the damn Bureau Control to assist you. Name
>drop me if you have to, mention we have a dying agent on our hands. I don't
care if it's a bubble chopper from the Korean war, just get something here!"
>"Yes, sir." Spender walked a few yards away and spoke long into his
Hand-held.
>Skinner returned to Scully's side. "Mulder?"
She straightened and looked up and back at him. "If we don't get
>Mulder to a hospital in the next two or three hours,..." she left the rest
unfinished. She'd given him a few sips of water but he'd been unable
>to swallow. He had lapsed into unconsciousness and his face was
gone grey.
>Skinner nodded. Looked around at the stares of the circle of agents,
all gawking in disbelief that the man had survived as long as he had.
>One of the herd was down and they looked like a bunch of Gnu's all
standing around, sniffing the blood on the air, puzzled by death.
>"Give them some room." Skinner snapped.
The small crowd broke apart and went to their invisible corners.
>Cueball Skinner, Scully thought. "Sir?"
Skinner crouched down.

>Scully took Mulder's limp wrist. "I need to to monitor his vitals. Just
keep your fingers here," She molded three fingers of his left hand
>around the Mulder's wrist until he could feel the tiny pulse.

Tiny.
>"I need to..." Scully bit her lip. She did not want to leave. Even

if her
body was screaming for her to. "I need a minute."

>Skinner nodded, comprehended. She'd spent nearly two days
sans
facilities. Now... she had to tend to herself.
>"I'll call if anything changes." Skinner assured her.
She nodded
and left, walking away across the sand and over a small
>rise where ragged bushes grew.
Skinner watched Mulder breath.
Slow, small movements of his chest.
>Almost not there.
Pulse, almost not.
>"Sir."
Spender's voice but Skinner thought it best not to take
his eyes off
>Mulder for a second. That would be the second...
"Sir, we've
contacted a private archeological dig. Their camp is about
>twenty miles from here. They have a small, private helicopter."

"Get them here Agent Spender."
>"Yes, sir. But someone there wants to speak to you. They claim to
know
you, sir."
>Now Skinner looked up. Spender handed the radio out to him.

Skinner grabbed the radio and Spender's outstretched hand. "Here.
Keep your
>fingers here, on his pulse. If it grows fainter, tell me immediately."

Spender swallowed but did as asked. He paled as his fingers
touched
>the sick agent's cold skin but bit back his revulsion at the sight
and
feel of death.
>Skinner was satisfied. Spender was all right, Skinner decided. Get
him
away from that yellow-fingered asshole and he might turn out
more
>than all right. He might become a good, trustworthy, hard
working
agent.
>Skinner thrust his lips to the radio. "Skinner here. Who wants to
speak to me?"
A voice crackled over the walkie-talkie's tiny
speaker. "Walter Skinner. Maybe
>you do not remember me."
Who could forget that noble voice. Who
could forget that brave who'd stared
>across his office at Cancer-Man and smiled pleasantly? "Albert
Holstein."
"You do remember."
>"Yes. You're with the Dig?"
"I'm their guide. Good money. But
too damn hot."
>Skinner nodded, it was the equivalent of a smile. "Thanks for the
use of your
helicopter."
>"That's my employer's helicopter. He hired me last week because his
other
guide didn't know what the hell he was talking about."

>"Oh?"
Albert didn't elaborate. "They're warming it up now. He
says we'll be twenty
>minutes
by the time we're in the air. But we have a moment to
talk right now. I'm
>coming too."
Skinner frowned. "Why you?"
>"I knew I would be hearing from my friends at the F.B.I. because
today I had an
oman. We found a grave site that contained many
bones."
>"Who's?"
"Relatives. I had a lot of ancestors..."
>Skinner did smile at that.
"...but among the bones of one grave,
we found something unusual. Something
>that should not have been there."
"What?"
>"The broken bones of a desert fox."

>Scully removed her wrinkled, dusty slacks and allowed her body
to
finally relieve itself. While away and alone and in the quiet,
she

>also allowed her heart to expell it's hoard.
She cried, long ears that left clean trails in her dust coated face.
>What if he died while she performed this not selfish but badly
timed act?
>What if only his flesh remained when she returned? What if
Skinner, watching her approach, stood up with that look on his

>face that spoke terrible sadness for Mulder pity and sorrow
for her?

>What if she screamed and sobbed while they all watched her
cradle Mulder in her arms and beg the creator to reverse his unfeeling

>decision?
She could think of no positive, beautiful thing in this isolated

>physical and mental place.
The desert was a life eating whore. Seems Ellise might be claiming a fifth

>victim in his beloved wasteland.
She finished her ministrations, and stood. The stars were

>indescribable out there in the dark. Billions. Burning forever.

If Mulder left her, it was perhaps at least a small consolation that

>he would be joining them. And that then, even so, he would have fought
their beauty until his very last heartbeat.

>She heard the distinct slicing of air from a helicopters blades.

Ran back to Mulder and his life which must - MUST - still be.

>Or, as the Backdrop to those fires in the sky over her, there was no
God.

>

>***
The chopper arrived and out stepped the pilot in head gear

>and Albert Hosteen. He'd aged yet looked the same.

Indomintable.
Inscrutable.

>Skinner met him and guided him to Mulder.
Scully had come back a moment before. She was holding Mulder's

>head in her lap. Looked up in plain suprise. "Albert?"
"Miss Scully. It is good to see you again."

>"Why are you here?"
Skinner had said nothing about the unusual and unexpected guest.

>"I know it may sound silly, but I've learned to trust the desert when it speaks
to me, and when the voices of the bones rise from the sands of time."

>"That sounds like an amazing story, Albert, but I'll have to hear it some
other time. We have to get Mulder on board as fast as we can."

>"Yes." Albert said. "But not just a story. The truth. F.B.I. Mulder - he is
dying?"

>"If we don't get help soon..." Skinner answered for her and had to ask, "What
did

>your oman say about that?"
"It told me to come. Maybe the rest will be revealed to us."

>Scully motioned for two agents to lift Mulder and place him on a trench coat
that

>had been layed flat to use as a guerny. They did so and hoited him in the air,
one

>agent at each corner, quickly trotting him to the chopper.
"It seems the desert keeps swallowing the Fox." Albert mused.

>"Yes," Scully had to shout over the chopper's loud engine and overheard whirly
blades. "But it also seems to keep spitting him back out again."

>Albert let out two or three guffaws. Scully didn't feel like laughing just then.
Enroute to Phoenix (the closest place with the facilities they would need
>and the best choice anyway), Albert ministered to Mulder in his way. Scully
watched,
>unconvinced but willing to allow almost anything if it kept Mulder alive one
moment more.
>Albert placed his hands, palms down, over Mulder's abdomen and chest. "He is
weak."
>Scully felt disappointed. That much was obvious.
"You doubt, Miss Scully." Albert commented. "But no matter. You have always

>doubted. It is your way. It has helped Sneaky Fox, you know. Sometimes his
curiosity
>is very stupid and foolish. But you give him balance."
Scully said nothing. But she listened with some renewed interest.

>Albert's hands continued to hover over Mulder, occasionally, moving this
way and that. She could almost feel those hands on her own stomach. It was a
>curious sensation.
"What are you doing....I mean, what is that suppose to do?" She asked regarding
>his "magic" hands.
"It helps me find the deep sickness, to see if he has followed it. I know it
>sounds ridiculous to a doctor. And it helps me understand what his bones
are saying."
>"His bones?"
"Yes. They are the last part of the body to die and the last part to return to
>the ground. They keep the spirit the longest."
Scully stared, started to say something when Skinner tapped her on the shoulder.

>She had to turn from Mulder and Albert, turn almost all the way around to
address him. "Yes, sir?"
>"How did you know the rope was there? You said you dug up the rope. How
did you know that you had to dig at all?"
>Scully bit her lip. Licked them. "Uh...that's a long story, sir, ummm, I'm not
sure
>if I even have an explanation. We were both...we were both feverish..." An
answer
>that was no answer at all.
Skinner frowned. After nearly six years, he supposed it was what he should
>have expected.
"Doubt, doubt, doubt..." Albert said under his breath but making sure it was
>loud
enough for her.
>She looked at him and he smiled back. "Sneaky Fox is very glad you were with
him.
>Not glad that you were in the well and hurt but,...glad. He says you would
understand
>the words."
Scully nodded.
>Albert leaned over and looked out the floor to ceiling window. "I think
we are here."
>The lights of a desert city appeared in the horizon.
Phoenix rose from the desert dunes.
>Life was once again abundantly around them.

>It was touch and go.
Touch and go Mulder.
>That should be his nickname, Scully thought. We're way beyond Spooky
these days.
>But his colossal luck had held out. He lived.

>Scully left Mulder's room, happy and tired and relieved and dying to discover
her hotel bathtub and bed. But a quick coffee would have

to do.

>She found Spender sitting in the visitors area. He had just finished eating.
Must have been sitting there for hours. Scully glanced down at his

>styrofoam plate.
Chicken bones.

>"Agent Spender." She greeted him.
"How is Mulder?"

>She was suprised by the sincerety she heard in the young agent's voice.
"He's going to be fine. He'll make a complete recovery..." Scully heard her

>own voice, stiff and flat like a wafer. She eased up, shared something, "And if
we're really lucky, he'll stay that way for a few monbths. Long enough for US to

>recover."
Spender didn't smile but his eyes told her he appreciated her effort. "I'm glad.

>I'm glad I was able to help."
Scully saw the honesty of it. Saw the truth of it too. "You want to know

>something?
the...."bare bones" of it? If you hadn't decided to come looking at the

>secondary site,
Mulder'd be dead right now and maybe me too. You saved his life. Thankyou for

>that."
Spender had no idea how to respond to that she she could see his startlement

>carefully encased in his officialdom that next came, "Well, I was just doing my
duty but I'm glad Mulder 's going to be all right." Gathering up his

>disassembled
feelings, he walked away.

>Scully let him go.
Skinner found her in the hospital cafe'.

"Mulder?" He asked as she stood in line

>for a coffee. The vending machine down the hall from Mulder's room was out
of order.

>"He can go home to D.C. in two days."
"How about you?"

>"Bump on the skull. Bruised ribs. A hairline crack of my left radius."
"We had the rest of the well dug up." Skinner said as she carried her coffe back

>in the direction of Mulder's room; down the hall and up three flights.
"What did they find?" Scully asked.

>"Bones. Lots of bones. Funny thing is, we ended up with five complete skeletons,
that's including the bones you used for Mulder's splint and to get yourself

>out of
the hole."

>"He had five wives then? Marriage records showed only four."

"The fifth skeleton was that of a male."

>"A man's bones? Who's?"
"We're not positive until we can get a dental record but those are few and far

>between for that period, or until we turn up somehing that can positively
identify the remains."

>"Well, who do they suspect he is?"
"Well, the build, age and general condition of the find suggest a man about the

>same age, height and weight of Ellise."
"Ellise? That's impossible, he disappeared. He built that house himself, the

>one over the well. It can't be his bones down there." Scully reasoned.
Skinner shrugged. "Albert Holstein doesn't agree."

>"Why?"
"He says truth becomes known. It pushes up through the sands of deception.

>He says someone else could have built the house. He thinks Ellise fell down
the well somehow. Accidently. But that the desert has it's own ways. It's own

>justices."
"But that's just speculation and wild at that. Myth. We need proof. Besides, for

>that to be true, then we should be searching for someone other than Ellise who
>oversaw the building of that house over the well, who knew why it was being
>built and who knew Ellise was dead. Maybe the very person who pushed Ellise
>down the well after his wives, if that's what really happened."
>"Maybe."
>Scully was tired. She didn't want to think anymore about wells, or Ellise or dead
>women's bones or Indian spirits. "Well, anyway. Mulder's okay and we did
>find where Ellise had been dumping his wives."
>"Mulder will want to hear about Alberts theory."
>Scully snorted. "Oh yeah. He will but I'm not going to tell him. The only theory

>Mulder's going to be exploring for the next little while is: Do I put the crutch
>under my right or my left armpit?"
>"He'll be staying with you?"
>Scully looked straight at him. Cleared her throat. "There's no one else. And he
>can't manage on his own with this kind of injury. And he might have a relapse.
>And he'll need rides to physio..." Scully stopped herself up short. Three reasons
>was enough. Skinner didn't need the whole list she'd typed up in her head....
>Mulder Would Be Staying With Her Because: etc, etc...

>"Funny you should say that." Skinner spoke through her jumbled emotions.
>"Why funny?"
>"Because Albert spoke about crutches too. He said: The truth doesn't need a
>crutch. It can stand on it's own two feet."
>
**
>"Mulder. Hey, it's me."
>Mulder's eyes flickered and opened. And that's about the only part of him
>that moved.
>SHE was smiling at him. Her voice was warming the room.
>His world for the present was the room. Scully filled it.
>"Hey." Ouch! Whispered this time, "hey." Tried to smile back at her. Lips were
>so cracked, they hurt with the effort. Who cared? "Hey, I've got a bone to
>pick with you."
>She started a bit. "What?"
>"Nothing. It just sounded like the thing to say under the circumstances."
>"Well, then, let me toss you a bone-"
>"-Touche'."
>"-Next time you decide to drag me off on one of your hunches, you'd better be
>damn certain you've informed someone. If in the future during any investigation,
>I find out you haven't informed anyone, I'll do more than kick your butt. I'll
>break
>your bones, Mulder. We're talking hurt here. We're talking you on my couch
>for weeks at my less than sympathetic mercy. You got me? Chew on that
>for a while, partner."
>"Yes, ma'am."
>Scully dropped her stern face and pasted on her dead serious but not longer
>pissed off one. "I don't think I need to tell you how close it was this time,
>Mulder."
>"No, but Scully-"
>"-Mulder. You put yourself in unnecessary danger. And me. I should have
>anticipated your ...impulsive tendencies and took appropriate measures."
>"Scully, I-"
>"Let me finish. Your hunch was sound. But how you went about substantiating
>it was not. It was stupid and because of that you almost died. Twice you stopped
>breathing on the way here."

>Mulder nodded as much as his drugged muscles would allow. He wiggled his

fingers in her palm, recognizing from experience that Scully was deadly serious.
>"It was stupid. I'm sorry Scully." He hoarse-coughed out. Looked over at the

water pitcher, looked back at her questioningly.

>"You can have water, yes." She poured out a half glass and helped him with the

straw. He drank it all.
>He watched her put the straw in the grabage, the glass upside down on the

paper towel spread across the tray. "You'll have to have some physio after
>the cast comes off. So you won't end up walking with a limp." She kept her

back turned as she reported that bit to him.
>He'd figured as much. "Hey, Scully. It won't happen again. Really." He hoped

she believed him because his throat hurt like hell from just the bit of
>talking he'd

done.

>Mulder remembered nothing at all of their time in the well. The chopper ride a

bit
>more. Voices mostly. And a dream of flying with god. Long haired wrinkled

diety.
>Scully turned back. Her eyes were red and moist and hurt. But not angry.

At least, no longer with him.
>"It better not happen again and I'll tell you why. Because no matter how

much I love you, I won't stay partnered with an agent who practises such
>casual disregard for his own safety and that of his partner."

That last part hurt. He never wanted harm for her. The first part...
>The first part....
..."Wh-what did you say?"
>"You heard me."
"Yeah. So,...so wh-what are we going to do about it?"
>"What are WE going to do? What YOU are going to do is stay here and rest

and get well." She tucked his covers up around his chin. Smoothed them.
>Straightened the corners of the bed sheets. amazing how the old training

came back. Lift mattress corner, fold one end in and under, tuck other
>in and vola' - the perfect hospital bed corner, tight and snug.

Didn't look at Mulder the whole time. "What I am going to do is go home
>for a few hours, shower, get some sleep and some decent food."

"Scully, do you reall-?"
>"Yes, really, Mulder. Now shut-up and rest."
"Yes, ma'am."

>She tucked the last corner in.
"Scully?"
>"Yes?"
"Even though I'm a bonehead?"
>"Even though, Mulder."
"Scully, you know I...I..."
>"I know." She straightened and clear blues stared into drugged up hazels.
"Now "bone up" on some shut-eye."
>"Yes ma'am."

>*
END
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End
file.